

CHAPTER THREE

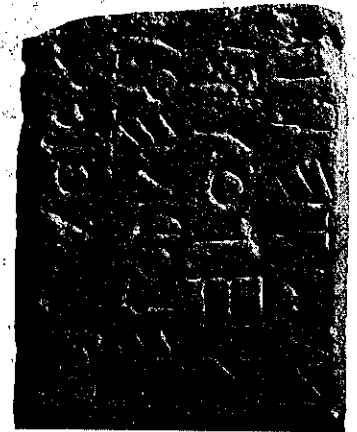
THE KINGS OF ROME

Written on the stone

THE INSCRIPTION DISCOVERED in 1899 under the black stone in the Forum includes the word 'king', or in Latin *rex*: *RECEI*, it appears in the early form of the language used there. That single word accounts for the inscription's fame and has changed the way the story of early Rome has been understood ever since.

The text is in many respects extremely frustrating. It is incomplete, the top third of the pillar not surviving. It is close to incomprehensible. The Latin is difficult enough anyway, but the missing section makes it almost impossible to grasp the meaning fully. Even though

14. The early inscription on the pillar excavated under the black stone could easily be mistaken for Greek; and indeed *was* by some later ancient observers themselves. It is in fact written in archaic Latin, in letters very similar to Greek, and is arranged in so-called *boustrophedon* ('ox-ploughing') style: that is, the lines are read alternately left to right, and right to left.



we can be certain that it does not mark the tomb of Romulus – or of anyone else – most interpretations amount to little more than brave attempts to string together into some vague sense the few individual words that are recognisable on the stone. One notable modern theory is that it was a warning not to let yoked animals drop excrement near the shrine – which would, apparently, have been a bad omen. It is also very hard to know how old it is. The only way to date the text is by comparing its language and script to the handful of other surviving



15. In this painting, 'The Oath of the Horatii' (1784), Jacques-Louis David depicts a legend from the reign of Tullus Hostilius, when Rome was at war with neighbouring Alba Longa. Two pairs of triplets, one on each side, agreed to fight it out themselves on behalf of their communities. Here David imagines the Roman Horatii taking their swords from their father. One of them returned home victorious, only to kill his sister (seen here weeping) who had been engaged to one of the enemy. It was a story, for the Romans no less than the eighteenth-century French, that both celebrated patriotism and questioned its cost.

examples of early Latin, for the most part equally uncertainly dated. Suggestions have ranged over 300 years, from around 700 to around 400 BCE. The current, fragile consensus is that it was inscribed in the second half of the sixth century BCE.

Despite all those unknowns, archaeologists instantly realised that the recognisable *RECEI* – in the dative case, meaning 'to or for the king' – supports what Roman writers themselves had claimed: that for two and a half centuries, up to the end of the sixth century BCE, the city of Rome had been under the control of 'kings'. Livy, among others, tells of a standard sequence of six monarchs following Romulus, each with a distinctive package of achievements attached to his name.

Their colourful stories – with a supporting cast of heroic Roman warriors, murderous rivals and scheming queens – take up the second half of the first book of Livy's *History*. After Romulus came Numa Pompilius, a peaceable character who invented most of the religious institutions of Rome; then Tullus Hostilius, a renowned warmonger; after him, Ancus Marcius, the founder of Rome's seaport at Ostia, 'Rivermouth'; then Tarquinius Priscus, or 'Tarquin the Elder', who developed the Roman Forum and the Circus Games; then Servius Tullius, a political reformer and the inventor of the Roman census; and finally, Tarquinius Superbus, 'Tarquin the Proud' or, perhaps better, 'the Arrogant'. It was the tyrannical behaviour of this second Tarquin, and of his family, that led to revolution, to the end of monarchy and to the establishing of 'liberty' and the 'free Republic of Rome'. He was a paranoid autocrat who ruthlessly eliminated his rivals, and a cruel exploiter of the Roman people, forcing them to labour on his fanatical building projects. But the awful breaking point came, as such breaking points did more than once in Roman history, with a rape – this time the rape of the virtuous Lucretia by one of king's sons.

Cautious scholars in the nineteenth century had been extremely doubtful about the historical value of these stories of the Roman kings. They argued that there was hardly any more firm evidence for these

rulers than for the legendary Romulus: the whole tradition was based on garbled hearsay and misunderstood myth – not to mention the propagandist fantasies of many of the later leading families at Rome, who regularly manipulated or invented the ‘history’ of the early city to give their ancestors a glorious role in it. It was only a short step from this, and a step that many notable historians then took, to claim that the Roman ‘regal period’, as it is now often called, never existed; that those famous kings were figments of the Roman imagination; that the true history of early Rome was entirely lost to us.

RECEI in Boni’s inscription successfully challenged that radical scepticism. No amount of special pleading (that, for example, *rex* here refers to a later religious official of the same name but not a king in the technical sense) could get round what now seemed undeniable: that Rome had once been some kind of monarchy. The discovery changed the nature of the debate on early Roman history, though, of course, it prompted other questions.

Even now, this inscription puts the idea of the Roman kings centre stage and raises the question of what kingship might mean in the context of a small, archaic community of a few thousand inhabitants living in wattle-and-daub huts on a group of hilltops near the river Tiber. The word ‘king’ almost certainly implies something much more formal, and grander, than we should be envisaging. But there were many different ways in which later Romans saw, or imagined, their early rulers. On the one hand, after the dramatic fall of Tarquinius Superbus, kings were an object of hatred for the rest of Roman history. To be accused of wanting to be *rex* was a political death sentence for any Roman; and no Roman emperor would ever countenance being called a king, even though some cynical observers wondered what the difference was. On the other hand, Roman writers traced many of their most significant political and religious institutions back to the regal period: if, in the legendary narrative, the city was conceived under Romulus, its gestation came under the kings, from Numa to

the second Tarquin. Abominated as they were, kings were credited with creating Rome.

This regal period is caught in that intriguing territory that straddles the boundary dividing myth from history. These successor kings certainly appear more real than the founder. If nothing else, they have apparently real names, such as ‘Numa Pompilius’, unlike the fictional ‘Romulus’, or ‘Mr Rome’. Yet throughout their stories we meet all kinds of flagrantly mythical elements. Some said that Servius Tullius, just like Romulus, was conceived from a phallus that emerged from a fire. It is almost always hard to identify what facts might be lurking in the fictional narrative that has come down to us. Merely to strip away the obviously fantastical elements and to assume that what is left represents an historical core is exactly the kind of simplistic approach that the nineteenth-century sceptics rightly resisted. Myth and history prove much more inextricably bound together than that. A full spectrum of possibilities and unknowables exists between the two extremes. Did someone called Ancus Marcius once exist but not do any of the things attributed to him? Were those things the work of some person or persons other than Ancus but of unknown name? And so on.

It is clear, however, that towards the end of the regal period – let’s say the sixth century BCE, though precision dating remains as hard as ever – we begin to reach slightly firmer ground. As Boni’s dramatic discoveries hint, it then becomes plausible, for the first time, to make some links between the stories the Romans told about their past, the archaeological traces in the ground and a historical narrative, in our sense of the term. What is more, we even get a glimpse of some of this history from the point of view of Rome’s neighbours and enemies. Exploits of Servius Tullius almost certainly feature in a series of paintings discovered in a tomb in the Etruscan city of Vulci, 70 miles to the north of Rome. Dating from around the mid fourth century BCE, they are by several hundred years the earliest direct evidence for him

that we have anywhere. Understanding the history of Rome at this period partly depends on exploiting for all they are worth the few such precious pieces of evidence we have; and we shall shortly be taking a closer look at this one.

Kings or chiefs?

The nineteenth-century sceptics had good reason to doubt the surviving Roman accounts of the regal period. There are all kinds of things about the kings that do not quite add up, most obviously their chronology. Even if we imagine unusually healthy lifespans, it is impossible to make seven kings, Romulus included, spread over the 250 years – from the mid eighth century to the late sixth century BCE – that Roman writers assigned to them. That would mean each of them reigned, on average, for more than three decades. No modern monarchy has ever equalled that consistent level of longevity.

The most economical solution to this problem is either to assume that the regal period was really much shorter than the Romans calculated or to propose that there were more kings than have come down in the record (there are, as we shall discover, a couple of potential candidates for these 'lost monarchs'). But it is also possible that the written tradition we have for this period is more fundamentally misleading than these simple solutions suggest and that, whatever the chronology, the character of Roman kingship was in reality radically different from what Livy and other Roman writers imply.

The biggest problem is that Rome's ancient historians tended systematically to modernise the regal period and to aggrandise its achievements, as if seeing them through some patriotic magnifying glass. According to their accounts, the early Romans already relied on such institutions as the senate and assemblies of the people, which were part of the political institutional furniture of the city half a millennium later; and in arranging the kingly succession (which was not

hereditary) they followed complex legal procedures that involved the appointment of an *interrex* (a 'between king'), a popular vote for the new monarch and senatorial ratification. What is more, the power struggles and rivalries they imagine at those moments of transition would not have looked out of place in the court of the Roman emperor in the first century CE. In fact, Livy's account of the wheeling and dealing after the murder of Tarquinius Priscus – in which his scheming wife Tanaquil carefully concealed the death until she had firmly secured the throne for her favourite, Servius Tullius – is similar to the wheeling and dealing by Livia after the death of the emperor Augustus in 14 CE (p. 381). It is so similar that some critics have suspected that Livy, who was writing from the 20s BCE, could not possibly have completed this section of his *History* until after 14 CE and must have based his description on the events of that year.

Roman relations with neighbouring peoples are described on a similarly grand scale, complete with treaties, ambassadors and formal declarations of war. Their fighting too is presented as if it involved large-scale clashes between mighty Roman legions and equally mighty enemies: we read of the cavalry charging the opposing flanks, of the infantry being forced to yield, of the opposition driven to confusion ... and various other clichés (or truths) of ancient battle. Indeed, this kind of language seeps into modern accounts of the period, many of which also confidently refer to such things as the 'foreign policy' of Rome in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE.

At this point a reality check is required. However else we may choose to describe the urban community of the early Romans, it remains somewhere on the spectrum between tiny and small. Population size in what is effectively prehistory is notoriously difficult to estimate, but the best guess is that the 'original' population of Rome – at whatever moment it was when the aggregate of little settlements started thinking of itself as 'Rome' – amounted to at most a few thousand. By the time the last king was thrown out, towards the end of the sixth century BCE, according to

standard modern calculations, we are probably dealing with something in the region of 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants. This is only a best guess based on the size of the place, the amount of territory that Rome probably controlled at that point and what population we could reasonably expect it to support. But it is much more likely than the exaggerated totals that ancient authors give. Livy, for example, quotes the very first Roman historian, Quintus Fabius Pictor, who wrote around 200 BCE and claimed that towards the end of the regal period the number of adult male citizens was 80,000, making a total population of well over 200,000. This is a ludicrous figure for a new community in archaic Italy (it is not far short of the total population of the territories of Athens or Sparta at their height, in the mid fifth century BCE), and there is no archaeological evidence for a city of any such size at this time, although the number does at least have the virtue of matching the aggrandising views of early Rome found in all ancient writers.

It is, needless to say, impossible to know anything much about the institutions of this small, proto-urban settlement. But unless Rome was different from every other archaic township in the ancient Mediterranean (or early townships anywhere), it would have



16. This late sixth- or early fifth-century inscription discovered in 1977 about 40 miles south of Rome is one of the best pieces of evidence for private militia in the early city. It is a dedication to the god Mars (here, in the Latin of the time, the last word, 'MAMARTEI') by the 'SUODALES' of Publius Valerius (here, 'POPLIOSIO VALESIOSIO', on the first line) perhaps the same man as one of the semi-legendary consuls in the first year of the Republic (p. 129), Publius Valerius Publicola. His SUODALES (*sodales* in classical Latin) may be, politely, his 'companions'; more realistically, they may be his 'gang'.

been much less formally structured than the stories suggest. Complex procedures involving an *interrex*, popular voting and senatorial ratification are entirely implausible in this context; at best, they are a radical rewriting of early history in a much later idiom. Military activity is another good case in point. Here geography alone should give us pause. We need simply look at the location of these heroic battles: they were all fought within a radius of about 12 miles of the city of Rome. Despite the style in which they are recounted, as if they were mini-versions of Rome against Hannibal, they were probably something closer, in our terms, to cattle raids. They may not even have been 'Roman' engagements in the strict sense of the word at all. In most early communities, it took a long time before the various forms of private violence, from rough justice and vendetta to guerrilla warfare, came fully under public control. Conflict of all sorts was regularly in the hands of individuals with their own following, the ancient equivalents of what we might call private warlords; and there was a blurry distinction between what was conducted on behalf of the 'state' and what on behalf of some powerful leader. Almost certainly that was the case in early Rome.

So where does that leave the kings and the word *rex* on the inscription from the Forum? *Rex* can certainly mean 'king' in the modern sense — a sense we broadly share with the Romans of the first century BCE. They, like us, would have had in mind not just an image of autocratic power and its symbols but also a theoretical concept of monarchy as a form of government, to be contrasted with, for example, democracy or oligarchy. It is extremely unlikely that anything of this sort was in the minds of the men who centuries earlier carved the stone in the Forum. For them, *rex* would have signalled individual power and prominence, but in a much less structured, 'constitutional' way. When we are discussing the realities, rather than the myths, of this early period of Rome's history, it might be better to think in terms of chiefs or big men instead of kings, and to think of the 'chiefly' rather than the 'regal' period.

Foundation stories: religion, time and politics

For Roman writers, the kings who followed Romulus were part of the extended foundation process of the city of Rome. Like him, these rulers were assumed to be historical characters (even if more sceptical writers doubted some of the taller stories told about them); but again, it is clear that much of the tradition that has come down to us, far from reality, is a fascinating mythical projection of later Roman priorities and anxieties into the distant past. It is not hard to spot many of the same themes and concerns that we found in the story of Romulus. These successor kings, for example, were said to come from all kinds of different backgrounds: Numa, like Titus Tatius, was a Sabine; Tarquinius Priscus came from Etruria and was the son of a refugee from the Greek city of Corinth; Servius Tullius was, according to those who rejected the story of the miraculous phallus, the son of a slave or at least of a prisoner of war (such was the dispute over his parentage that of all the triumphing generals listed on the roster in the Forum, Servius is the only one whose father's name is omitted). Although we read of occasional Romans, usually the 'bad' ones in these stories, complaining that foreigners or the low-born are taking away their birthright, the overall message is unmistakable: even at the very pinnacle of the Roman political order, 'Romans' could come from elsewhere; and those born low, even ex-slaves, could rise to the top.

Rome under the kings also continued to be torn apart by bitter civil war and family conflicts. Moments of succession proved particularly dangerous, and bloody. Of the seven kings, it was alleged that three were murdered; a divine lightning bolt struck another as punishment for a religious error; and Tarquinius Superbus was expelled. Only two died in their beds. It was the sons of Ancus Marcius, in resentment at being passed over for the throne, who hired the assassins of Tarquinius Priscus. Servius Tullius was murdered for similar reasons by Superbus,

who was in league with his victim's own daughter. In a particularly gruesome twist, the daughter is supposed to have deliberately driven over the dead body with her carriage and brought her father's blood into her house on its wheels. This theme certainly picks up the idea that civil conflict was embedded in Roman politics, but it also points to another fault line in Roman political culture: that is, how power was transmitted from person to person or generation to generation. It is worth noting that more than half a millennium later, the first dynasty of new autocrats, the emperors from Augustus to Nero, had a similar, or even worse, record of brutal death, largely murder, or alleged murder, from within the family.

The regal period, however, did more than simply replay the issues that Romulus raised. To follow the logic of the story, by the end of Romulus' rule, Rome was still only half formed. Each of the successors made his own distinctive contribution, so ensuring that when the monarchy eventually fell, Rome was equipped with most of the characteristic institutions that made it Roman. Numa Pompilius and Servius Tullius were given the credit for the most significant of these. Servius Tullius is supposed to have devised the method of counting and rank-ordering the Roman people known as the census. This lay at the heart of ancient Rome's political process for centuries, enshrining in it a fundamental hierarchical principle: that the rich had by right more power than the poor. But before him, Numa is said to have established, more or less single-handedly, the structure of official Roman religion, and religious institutions that left their mark, and their names, well beyond the limits of this book. In fact, the official title of the Catholic popes even now – *pontifex*, or 'pontiff' – derives or was borrowed from the title of one of the priesthoods supposedly founded by Numa.

Looking back over their city's rise to dominance in the Mediterranean and beyond, later Romans attributed their extraordinary success not merely to military prowess. They had triumphed, they

reasoned, because they had the gods on their side: their pious devotion to religion guaranteed their success. And, to reverse the axiom, any failure they encountered could be put down to some fault in their dealings with the gods: perhaps they had ignored bad omens, wrongly conducted a key ritual or run roughshod over religious rules. Their piety became a boast in their dealings with the outside world. At the beginning of the second century BCE, for example, when one Roman official wrote to the Greek town of Teos, on the western coast of modern Turkey, guaranteeing the Teans' political independence (in the short term, at least), he rammed that message home. We can still read his somewhat pompous words, inscribed on a block of marble that was displayed in the town: 'The fact that we Romans have, absolutely and consistently, judged reverence towards the gods as of first importance is proved by the favour we have received from them on this account. In addition, we are quite certain for many other reasons that our high respect for the divine has been evident to everybody.' Religion, in other words, underwrote Roman power.

There are a few glimpses of this in the story of Romulus. As well as dedicating the Temple of Jupiter Stator, he consulted the gods in deciding where exactly to found the new city: it was partly a disagreement about how to interpret the divine signs, observed in the flight of some birds, that led to the fatal quarrel between Romulus and Remus. But it was his successor, the peace-loving Numa, who was given the role of 'the founder of Roman religion'.

This did not make Numa a holy figure along the lines of Moses, the Buddha, Jesus or Muhammad. The traditional religion of Rome was significantly different from religion as we usually understand it now. So much modern religious vocabulary – including the word 'religion', as well as 'pontiff' – is borrowed from Latin that it tends to obscure some of the major differences between ancient Roman religion and our own. In Rome there was no doctrine as such, no holy book and hardly even what we would call a belief system. Romans *knew* the gods

existed; they did not *believe in* them in the internalised sense familiar from most modern world religions. Nor was ancient Roman religion particularly concerned with personal salvation or morality. Instead it mainly focused on the performance of rituals that were intended to keep the relationship between Rome and the gods in good order, and so ensure Roman success and prosperity. The sacrifice of animals was a central element in most of these rituals, which otherwise were extraordinarily varied. Some were so outlandish that they undermine better than anything else the modern stereotype of the Romans as stuffy and sedate: at the festival of Lupercalia in February, for example, naked young men ran round the city whipping any women they met (this is the festival that the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* re-creates). In general, it was a religion of doing, not believing. In line with this, Numa's foundation had two different but related aspects. On the one hand, he established a series of priesthoods to perform or oversee major rituals, including, among an otherwise overwhelmingly male line-up, the Vestal Virgins, with their duty to

17. The head of a statue of a Vestal Virgin, from the second century CE; recognisable by her distinctive headdress. The Vestals were one of the very few groups of female priests of Roman public religion. They were also one of the very few full-time groups of religious officials, living 'on the job' in a house next to the temple of the goddess Vesta, with its sacred hearth, in the Forum. They were bound to chastity on pain of death.



keep the flame alight on the city's sacred hearth in the Forum. On the other hand, he devised a calendar of twelve months, which provided the framework for the annual roster of festivals, holy days and holidays. A crucial aspect of any organised community is its ability to structure time, and in Rome it was Numa who was given the credit for inventing that structure. What is more; notwithstanding all kinds of later innovations and refinements, the modern Western calendar remains a direct descendant of this early Roman version, as the names we give to our months show: every single one of them is Roman. Among all the things we fancy we have inherited from ancient Rome, from drains to place names, or the offices of the Catholic Church, the calendar is probably the most important and the most often overlooked. It is a surprising link between that early regal period and our world.

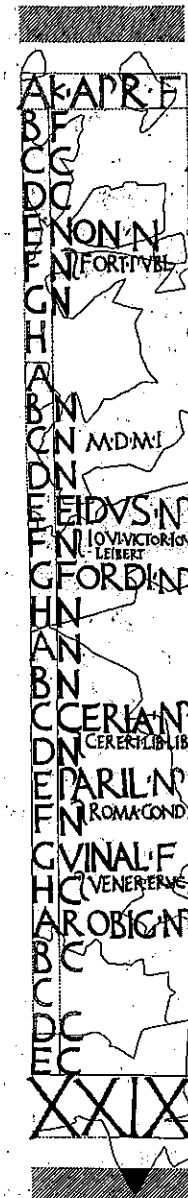
Whether or not anyone called Numa Pompilius ever existed is impossible to know; still less whether he did any of the things ascribed to him. Roman scholars discussed his career intensely, accepting some aspects of the tradition about him but firmly rejecting others. He could not possibly, for example, have been the pupil of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, as one popular and tenacious story went; for, they argued, on any plausible chronology Pythagoras lived more than a century after Numa (or, as we now reckon, in the sixth rather than the seventh century BCE). But no matter how legendary or, at best, shadowy Numa was, one thing seems certain: some form of the calendar ascribed to him is the product of an early period in Rome's history.

In fact, the earliest written version of a Roman calendar that we have – although itself from no earlier than the first century BCE – points strongly in that direction. It is an extraordinary survival, found painted on a wall in the town of Antium (modern Anzio), some 35 miles south of Rome, and offers a vivid, if slightly perplexing, glimpse of how Romans of Cicero's time pictured their year. Nothing in early Rome would have been as complex as this. There are signs of all kinds

of developments over the centuries, including some radical changes in the ordering of months and in the starting point of the year – for how else could November and December, meaning literally 'ninth month' and 'tenth month', respectively, have ended up in this calendar, and our own, as the eleventh and twelfth months in the sequence? But there are also hints of an ancient pedigree in this first-century BCE version.

Its system is basically one of twelve lunar months, with an extra month (the distant precursor of our extra day in a leap year) inserted from time to time to keep this calendar in proper alignment with the solar year. The biggest challenge facing primitive calendars everywhere is the fact that the two most obvious, natural systems of timekeeping are incompatible: that is to say, twelve lunar months, from new moon to new

18. The month of April from the earliest surviving Roman calendar, found painted on a wall in Antium, south of Rome. It is a highly coded document, laid out in twenty-nine days from top to bottom. In the left-hand column, a sequence of letters (A–H) designate a regular pattern of market days. In the second column more letter symbols (C, F, N etc.) define the public status of the day concerned (for example, C for *comitalis* indicates that an assembly might be held on that day). The words on the right mark the individual festivals, most being do to with agriculture in some form. The ROBIG(ALIA), for example, was concerned with protecting the growing crops from corn-blight, the VINAL(IA) with the new wine. Although this version dates only to the first century BCE, its basic principles are much older.



moon, add up to just over 354 days; and this cannot be made to match in any convenient way the $365\frac{1}{4}$ days of the solar year, which is the time it takes for the earth to make one complete circuit of the sun, from spring equinox to spring equinox, for instance. The wholesale insertion of an extra month every few years is just the kind of rough-and-ready method typical of early attempts to solve the problem.

No less revealing is the cycle of religious festivals that are recorded in the calendar. The nucleus of these may well have originated as far back as the regal period. Certainly the focus of many of them, so far as we can reconstruct it, is on the support of the gods for the seasonal concerns of animal husbandry and agriculture: sowing, harvesting, grape picking, storing and so forth – exactly the concerns that one would expect to weigh heavily in a small, archaic Mediterranean community. Whatever these festivals meant in the urban metropolis of the first century BCE, the majority of whose inhabitants would have had little to do with flocks, herds or harvesting, they probably do represent a snapshot of the priorities of the earliest Romans.

A different set of priorities is reflected in the political institutions attributed to Servius Tullius – sometimes now given the inappropriately grand title of ‘the Servian Constitution’, partly because they were so fundamental to the later working of Roman politics. He is supposed to have been the first to organise a census of the Roman citizens, formally enrolling them in the citizen body and classifying them in different ranks according to their wealth. But more than that, he linked this classification to two further institutions: the Roman army and the organisation of the people for voting and elections. The precise details are almost unfathomably complicated and have been debated since antiquity. Academic careers have been made and lost in the fruitless search for the exact arrangements supposedly put in place by Servius Tullius, and their subsequent history. But the basic outlines are clear enough. The army was to be made up of 193 ‘centuries’, distinguished according to the type of equipment the soldiers

used; this equipment was related to the census classification, on the principle of ‘the richer you are, the more substantial and expensive equipment you can provide for yourself’. Starting at the top, there were eighty centuries of men from the richest, first class, who fought in a full kit of heavy bronze armour; below these came four more classes, wearing progressively lighter armour down to the fifth class, of thirty centuries, who fought with just slings and stones. In addition, above these there were an extra eighteen centuries of elite cavalry, plus some special groups of engineers and musicians, and at the very bottom of the pecking order a single century of the very poorest, who were entirely exempt from military service.



19. The Roman census. This detail of a late second-century BCE sculpture depicts the registration of citizens. On the left a seated official records the information on the wealth of the man standing in front of him. Though the exact procedure is not entirely clear, the connection with military organisation is indicated by the presence of the soldier on the right.

Servius Tullius is supposed to have used these same structures as the basis of one main voting assembly of the Roman people: the Centuriate Assembly (so called after the centuries), which in Cicero's day came together to elect senior officials, including the consuls, and to vote on laws and on decisions to go to war. Each century had just one block vote; and the consequence (or intention) was to hand to the centuries of the rich an overwhelming, built-in political advantage. If they stuck together, the eighty centuries of the richest, first class plus the eighteen centuries of elite cavalry could outvote all the other classes put together. To put it another way, the individual rich voter had far greater voting power than his poorer fellow citizens. This was because, despite their name – which looks as if it should mean that they comprised 100 (*centum*) men each – the centuries were in fact very different in size. The richest citizens were far fewer in number than the poor, but they were divided among eighty centuries, as against the twenty or thirty for the more populous lower classes, or the single century for the mass of the very poorest. Power was vested in the wealthy, both communally and individually.

In detail, this is not only terribly complicated but also anachronistic. Whereas some of the innovations attributed to Numa might not have been out of place, as we have seen, in early Rome, this is a flagrant projection into the past of much later Roman practices and institutions, complete with Servius Tullius as founding father. The complex system of property valuation entailed in the census is inconceivable in the early city; and the elaborate structures of the centuriate organisation in both army and assembly are totally out of scale with the citizen body of the regal period and with the likely character of its warfare (this isn't how you conduct a raid on the next-door village). Whatever changes in fighting or voting might have been instituted under some 'Servius Tullius', they could not have been anything like what Roman tradition claimed.

Yet by pushing all this back into the formative period of their city,

Roman writers were underlining the importance of some key institutions and key connections in Roman political culture, as they saw it. In the census, they were highlighting the power of the state over the individual citizen, as well as that characteristic commitment of Roman officialdom to documenting, counting and classifying. They were also pointing to a traditional connection between the political and military roles of the citizen, to the fact that for many centuries Roman citizens were also, by definition, Roman soldiers, and to one of the treasured assumptions of many of the Roman elite: namely, that wealth brought both political responsibility and political privilege. Cicero reflects exactly that when he sums up Servius Tullius' political objectives in approving tones: 'He divided the people in this way to ensure that voting power was under the control not of the rabble but of the wealthy, and he saw to it that the greatest number did not have the greatest power – a principle that we should always stand by in politics.' In fact, this principle came to be vigorously contested in the politics of Rome.

Etruscan kings?

Servius Tullius was one of the last three kings of Rome, sandwiched between Tarquinius Priscus and Tarquinius Superbus. Roman scholars believed that they ruled over the city through the sixth century BCE, until Superbus was finally deposed in (according to most accounts) 509 BCE. As we have just seen, parts of the narrative of this period were no less mythologised than the story of Romulus. And there are some chronological impossibilities – or, at least, the usual implausible longevities – in the traditional tale. Even some ancient writers were uncomfortable with the idea that there appeared to be roughly 150 years between the birth of Priscus and the death of his son Superbus, a problem they sometimes tried to solve by suggesting

Guiding Questions and Intuitions for *SPQR* pgs. 91-109

As you read through this section of SPQR (by the eminent Mary Beard), you will notice that your previous knowledge of Rome's mythic history and of its kings contrasts heavily with the scholarly and archaeological evidence she presents in her book. As you answer these questions, please keep in mind this juxtaposition between the myth, and what little truth has been revealed.

1. Indicate one of the clearest ways we can tell that the traditional storyline and history of the kings is highly improbable (or rather, quite outrageously impossible):

2. Describe one of the ways in which ancient historians have blurred the lines between their own history, and the history of the kings:

3. What is the (hilarious) description of battles that Beard suggests occurred during the 6th century BCE? How does she envision what ancient historians described as full and complex engagements?

4. Explain how Romans might have viewed the concept of a *rex*, and how it might be different from our formal notions of royalty and monarchy.

5. Explain the differences between our conceptions of religion and the Romans' (pg. 102-103).

6. What are the two aspects of the Roman calendar that Beard identifies as fossil remnants from an older and more primitive calendar?